

Grace Episcopal Church
Scripture 202: Introduction to the Bible
Session 13: Restoration of Judah
Wednesday, January 11, 2012

Sources:

Fant, et.al. Chapter 12, pp. 221 – 232

Suggested Bible Readings: Ezra

The Restoration (538 – 424 BC)

Key Writings:

500s BC: Haggai, Zechariah, Obadiah, Job

400s BC: 3rd Isaiah (56-66), Malachi, Joel, Jonah, Ruth, Torah (in final form)

300s BC: Esther, Song of Solomon, Ezra, Nehemiah, 1 & 2 Chronicles

Rule of Nebuchadnezzar didn't last long (605-562) Nabonidus (556-539) more a scholar than a fighter – Persia takes over without a fight.

Restoration but under foreign rulers

Cyrus of Persia glorified – took over in 539 BC – extended from Greece to India and from Asia Minor to North Africa.

Philosophy of Conquest: Local rule and custom under watch Persia eye.

- Considered themselves benevolent rulers
- Peace and order
- Trade and road system
- Communication system
- Allowed rebuilding of local worship areas and financed them
 - Cyrus Cylinder
 - Gives credit to god marduk
 - Israel gives credit to YHWH – Ezra gives different version

Return of Exiles SLOW

Groups of Returnees:

1. Ezra says first group was under leadership of Sheshbazzar son of Jehoiachin
 - Laid the foundation of the Temple but did not complete

2. Late 500s under leadership of Zerubbabel grandson of Jehoiachin and in line of House of David

- Haggai encouraged them to complete Temple
- H said there would be a Messianic Kingdom under Z

Why did it take so long to rebuild the Temple?

- Cyrus might have not give as much \$\$\$ as promised
- Local fundraising drive among Jews not enough
- Returning exiles discouraged and in survival mentality
- Opposition of local groups to building
 - Samaritans say don't do it or they will rebel
 - Questioned motives of returning people

The chronology of Ezra and Nehemiah is in dispute. Both came after the Temple was built.

3. Ezra “architect of Judaism” – 458 BC

- Worked in Jerusalem and focus was Jewish social and religious life
- Introduced social customs to keep Jews insulated from outside influence
 - Prohibition of marriage with non-Jewish spouses
- Brought back Torah and began public readings of it
- Move to obedience of YHWH law
- Had authority from Persian ruler Artaxerxes that allowed him to move people to God's law

4. Nehemiah

- Appointed governor of Judah and served from 445 – 424 BC
- Rebuilt wall around Jerusalem and people moved into the city
- Abolished interest loans and lower taxes
- Initiated religious reforms
 - Required observance of Sabbath
 - Tithes to Levites to support Temple class
 - Prohibited interracial marriage
 - Emphasize pure Jewish ancestry

The Literature of the Restoration (p. 225, Fant)

Primary Literature of the period:

Isaiah 50 – 66 (2nd & 3rd Isaiah)

Latter prophets: Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

Writings: Ruth, Ezra, Nehemiah, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Esther and Song of Solomon

1 & 2 Chronicles:

- 4th Century BC
- History of David – Solomon and the Kings of the Southern Kingdom
- Sources of lit: Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, and Zechariah – main history
- One scroll
- Drew also from 1 & 2 Kings and Samuel
- Explains misfortunes of YHWH people as unfaithfulness
- Temple orientation on worship
- Stress purity of Jewish people and non-Jews excluded

Ezra & Nehemiah

- One book by Chronicler
- Describes situation in Judah after Exile
- Devoted to the Law and the Temple as a continuation of the worship in David's time

Haggai

- 5 short addresses to Zerubbabel, Joshua, and people of Jerusalem to complete the building of the Temple
- 2 major themes is Temple and a purified community

Zechariah

- 14 chapters, first 8 to prophet, others written anonymous as late as 3rd Century
- 8 visions of restored Temple and Jerusalem
- Foresees time of messianic age for Jewish people

Joel

- 3 chapters hard to date
- Nothing know of prophet except son of Pethuel
- Plague of locusts as sign of nearness of “the day of YHWH” – cleansing.

Obadiah

- 5th or 6th century BC
- Condemns Edom for participation on attack of Jerusalem in 587 BC
- Edom's destruction is warnings to other nations would oppose God

Malachi

- Not a person name, name means “messenger” wrote between 515-445 BC
- The new age has not come with the building of the Temple
- Defends God's love for Judah

- Recent devastation of Edom is a sign from God
- Criticizes inferior sacrifices to God
- Temple worship should be taken seriously
- First prophet to condemn divorce (2:16)

3rd Isaiah (Chapters 56-66)

- Disillusioned that new restoration did not lead to faithfulness of people
- Some judgment to come
- Hits the themes: proper ritual, Sabbath observance, reverence for the Law

Ruth

- Romantic story set in period of confederacy in time of Judges
- Purpose to create sympathy for those foreigners who believed in God
- Tells of birth of Boaz – grandfather to King David

Jonah

- Unique that it is a single story not a series of oracles
- Might have been written to correct narrow exclusiveness of Judaism following Ezra-Nehemiah
- Might have pointing to Moses and God is gracious and merciful even to those Assyrian sinners
- Repentance, loving kindness, forgiveness used heavily

Esther

- Book of historic fiction of Jewish persecution under Xerxes 486-465 BC – Persian
- Hebrew and Protestant Bible – shorter version
- Septuagint, Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Bible – longer
- Purim festival celebrates the deliverance of Jews in Esther

Song of Solomon

- Collection of love poems
- No mention of God or other overly religious subjects
- Probably used in Jewish wedding festivals
- Jews and Christians say it is an allegorical to love of God

The Divine-Human Encounter in the Restoration

Themes:

- Law
 - Became central element of Hebrew life
 - Ezra made binding law of the land

- Law became main authority on practice/ethics
- Temple
 - Monarchy and Temple shared authority
 - Temple is where God is especially present
 - Torah provided guidance for worship
 - High priest ultimate authority post-monarchy
- Exclusivism
 - God's chosen people
 - Discouraged foreign influence, not neighborly
 - Isolated by monotheism
- Universalism
 - Counter balance to exclusive tendencies
 - Ruth/Moabite, Jonah/Nineveh, Malachi/non-jewish sacrifices okay to God
- Prophecy
 - Continued but lost vitality
 - Merged mostly into priestly functions
 - Prophetic literature ended by 4th century BC